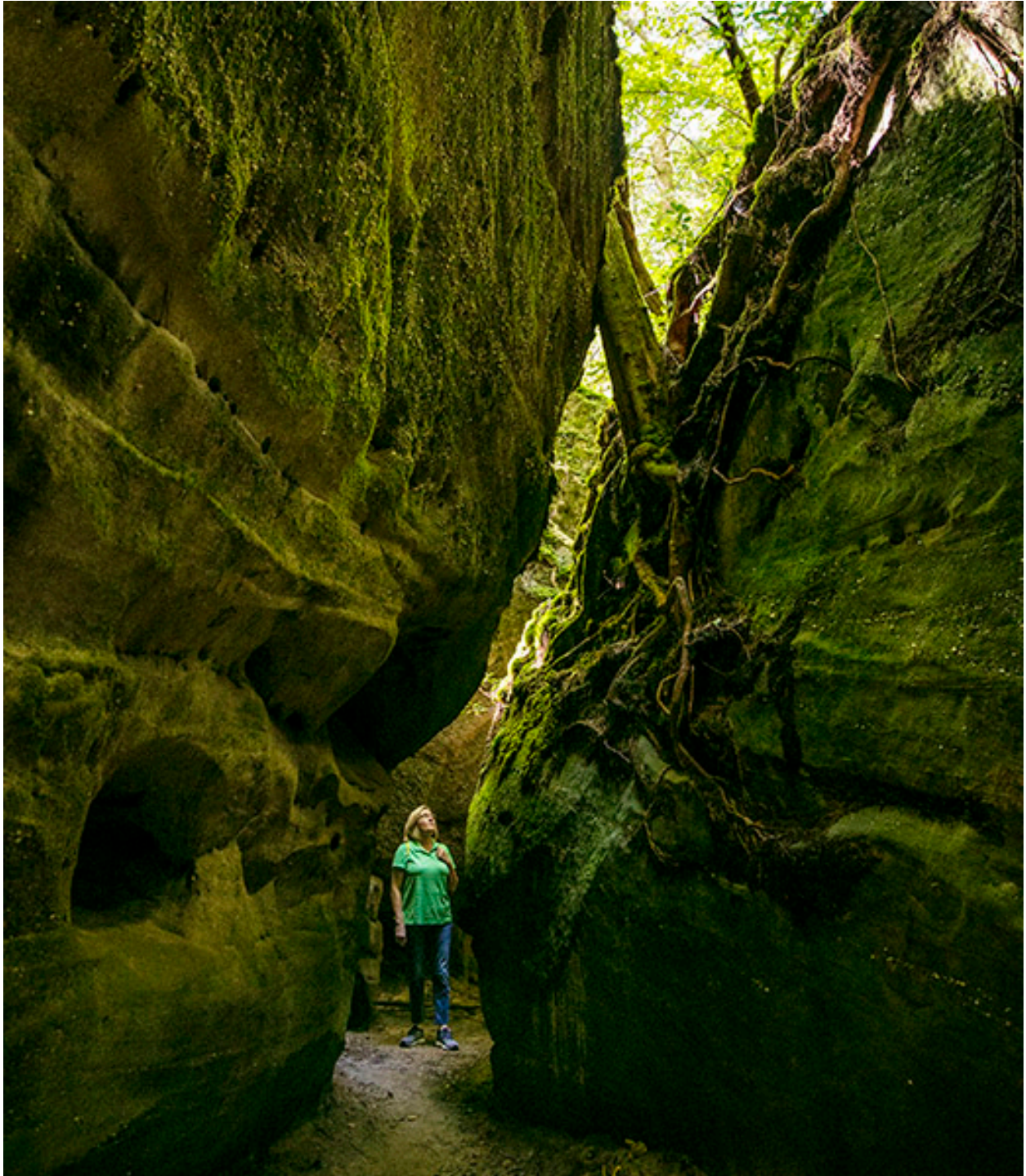


Dismals Canyon



Be prepared for a few tight squeezes in Dismals Canyon. | Photo courtesy Alabama Tourism Department and Chris Granger

"You can't really tell where the canyon wall stops and the night sky starts. They look like stars," says Beverley Franklin, caretaker of a spot unique in North America for its epic colony of "glow worms." *Orfelia fultoni*, known locally as dismalites, emit a bright blue glow and propagate twice a year in Franklin County's Dismals Canyon. The best views of this otherworldly phenomenon, available on guided night tours, happen between April and June. "It's magical," Franklin says. And there's more to explore in daylight hours. The 1.5-mile canyon floor boasts a primeval swamp lifted skyward during the Paleozoic era about 541 million to 252 million years ago, dozens of sandstone-sheltered grottos, waterfalls, land bridges, and a natural arboretum, which is home to 27 native species within 100 feet of each other. Another famous resident? A 370-year-old Canadian hemlock thought to have hitchhiked here via glacier during the Ice Age. The canyon is operated commercially by a privately run nature conservancy. Visit in a day trip or reserve one of two well-appointed cabins for an overnight stay.